NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES

SAMPLE APPLICATION NARRATIVE

Fellowships
History and Biography

National Endowment for the Humanities

Division of Research Programs

Excerpt from a Successful Application

This excerpt from a fellowships application is provided as an example of a funded proposal. It will give you a sense of how a successful application may be crafted. It is not intended to serve as a model. Every application is different, depending on the requirements of the project, the stage of the research, the resources required, and the situation of the applicant. This sample includes only the narrative and the bibliography; it does not include the résumé or letters of recommendation.

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Project Title: A Biography of Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902), 19th-Century Feminist and Intellectual

Project Director: Lori Ginzberg, Pennsylvania State University-Main Campus

Result: *Elizabeth Cady Stanton: An American Life*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2009.

A Biography of Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902)

Few nineteenth-century women loom quite as large as the American woman's rights thinker and activist, Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Stanton's proclamation that the "history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman, having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her," issued in the Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments in 1848, launched her career as a major intellectual figure of her time (Stanton, "HWS," 70). By insisting on the Declaration's ninth resolution, that "it is the duty of the women of this country to secure to themselves their sacred right to the elective franchise," she helped establish woman suffrage itself as a central goal of the movement that would follow. She lived through dramatic changes in the status of middle-class women, celebrated the emancipation of the slaves, experienced the political trials of Reconstruction, and witnessed the emergence of an industrial nation. Far more than simply a leader of the movement for woman suffrage, or half of the much-celebrated "Stanton-Anthony" duo, she emerges from the record as a woman eager to do battle over the most controversial ideas of her age.

The traditional narrative of the movement for woman's rights has been transformed over the past three decades, with the publication of important scholarship about black women's activism, European feminism, and the racialized assumptions of the woman's movement itself. Scholars have underscored the ways that Enlightenment notions of the independent citizen marginalized women, even as they have explicated the ways that women, although voteless, participated in state and national politics. Issues that have long troubled analyses of the movement for woman's rights, including its leaders' claims both to universality and to American uniqueness, have been critically assessed, and life stories of leading activists, including Abby Kelley, Lucy Stone, Susan B. Anthony, Martha Coffin Wright, Sojourner Truth, Ernestine Rose, and Victoria Woodhull, have been written.

Yet there has been no serious biography of Stanton, arguably the foremost feminist intellectual of her generation, for twenty years. Benefitting from my own scholarly engagement in questions of women's political identities and reform activism, this book will grapple with the complex, engaging, and difficult woman Stanton was, assess the connections between her personal and her public passions, and view her life as a window onto American social and intellectual change. It will critically explore Stanton's positions on woman's rights, racial justice, immigrants' organizing, and class difference. Now that historians have begun to revise an older map of nineteenth-century feminism that marked only watersheds in a history of progress and pride, I plan to write a biography of Elizabeth Cady Stanton that will reshape the narrative of nineteenth-century feminism within the context of American intellectual life itself.

The outlines of Elizabeth Cady Stanton's life are well known. Born into an upper-class family in Johnstown, New York, Elizabeth Cady was the eighth child of the socially-conservative Judge Daniel Cady and the aristocratic Margaret Livingston. The
constraints that her background, and her father in particular, placed on the intellectually-restless child provided much of Stanton's own explanation for her nascent feminism, but they were hardly unique, and gave little indication that she would become
the major American theorist of woman's rights.

It was her marriage to the lawyer and abolitionist Henry Brewster Stanton, and her entry into his community of social reformers, that transformed Elizabeth Cady Stanton's world. Henry would prove to be ambivalent about his wife's activism, and he played only a shadowy role in Stanton's own account of

her life. But her marriage, if conventional in many respects, constituted a profound break with her past. Certainly the personal and the political were inseparable for the young Stantons who, immediately upon marrying, left for London to attend the World Anti-Slavery Convention (1840). That experience--of male delegates excluding women from the proceedings and of Stanton's illuminating discussions about woman's rights with the prominent Quaker abolitionist Lucretia Mott--has become iconic within women's history.

By 1848, now a provincial mother of three, Stanton was restless and longing for action when she organized the convention at Seneca Falls that has become known, in large part through her own efforts, as the birthplace of the American woman's rights movement. Although she remained close to home for years after the convention, Stanton had found her calling. With the support and prodding of her new friend, Susan B. Anthony, whom she met in 1851, Stanton determined to devote her life to the struggle for woman's rights as a writer, speaker, and theorist.

Like others of her generation, Stanton's life was transformed by the Civil War. As abolitionists, she and Anthony were committed to ending slavery, but they also believed that the women of the North would be granted new rights in the postwar world. Instead, Reconstruction offered a painful dilemma: whether to support amendments that granted the rights of citizenship and suffrage only to African-American men, or to hold out for proposals that included women as well. Stanton and Anthony were outraged at their colleagues' decision to endorse a federal amendment, the fourteenth, that for the first time added the word "male" to the Constitution. Following the defeat of universal suffrage, Stanton and Anthony formed the National Woman Suffrage Association, making alliances across boundaries of party, principle, and political opinion. Although historians have tended to accept Stanton's insistence that theirs was the "true" feminist path, and so have downplayed the blatant racism that emerged in her writing from this time, this book will rethink the ethical and political choices woman's rights acivists confronted in the face of Southern defeat, national reunification, and the emancipation of the slaves.

Stanton and Anthony's relationship was strengthened by the fires of controversy. Together they founded the NWSA, edited the "Revolution," supported efforts at organizing wage-earning women, and edited a massive compendium of sources from the years of suffrage struggle. But the women's remaining years tell a story of diverging ideological paths. For Anthony, the vote was the primary and essential means to achieve women's independence. Stanton, the daughter and wife of lawyers, also maintained that the American system of government was the fairest on earth, whose inadequacies would be repaired by admitting women to equal citizenship. At the same time, Stanton, who was deeply invested in her identity as the mother of seven children, endorsed women's sexual, reproductive, and marital rights; she caused bitter controversy among supporters of woman's rights with her proposal for liberalized divorce laws, which she viewed as fundamental to women's autonomy. Unlike Anthony, Stanton thought the vote an inadequate goal in the face of women's emotional, sexual, and psychological dependence, and their place in cultural and religious traditions that, she believed, denigrated their self respect.

It was on the question of religion that Stanton triggered the greatest storm. The young Elizabeth Cady had turned early to a freethinking attitude toward religious faith. By the 1890s Stanton had become more vociferous in her approach toward men's authority over biblical texts. Thus she embarked upon the "Woman's Bible," which, more than a reinterpretation of scriptural texts, was an attack on scripture that deeply alienated her co-workers, who regarded the book as "the most devastating weapon in the antisuffrage arsenal" (Kern, 5) at a time of religious renewal. Yet in a larger sense, the "Woman's Bible" controversy reflected both Stanton's radicalism and her attachment to the milieu from which she came.

Complex and contradictory, Elizabeth Cady Stanton's story reminds us that American middle-class culture produced both grand ideals and provincial isolation, elitism and universalism, racism and

emancipation. When she declared that every woman was "the arbiter of own destiny, an imaginary Robinson Crusoe… [whose] rights … are to use all her faculties for her own safety and happiness" (DuBois, 1981, 247), Stanton fully embraced that culture's characteristic individualism--its very American, and very Protestant, conviction that people were responsible for their own condition and their own salvation. Conservative and exclusive though it was in some ways, Stanton's belief that the American political tradition contained a universal language of rights also offered what African-American, European, working-class, and non-Protestant activists recognized as its most radical aspect: by inviting people to rebel, it made it impossible for any one group to keep the demand for equal rights and full citizenship entirely to itself.

In her personal relations as well, Elizabeth Cady Stanton embodied contradiction. Although she argued passionately for the rights of all women, she expressed little affection for women as a group. Even as the founder of a movement, Stanton squirmed in organizations, and rarely attended conventions. While audiences applauded her "maternal" presence on the stage, and Stanton referred frequently to the power of motherhood, she struggled mightily with the constraints posed by frequent childbirth and the responsibilities of family and home. Part of a generation of joiners, she was not communal by inclination. Elizabeth Cady Stanton was, she admitted late in her life, happiest when "hurling my thunder" at opponents (Kern, 53).

Stanton was highly alert to her place in history, and her story is complicated by her own participation in telling it. Her autobiography, "Eighty Years and More," is a masterpiece of self-representation, omitting her differences with Anthony, with her husband, or with other feminists. The "History of Woman Suffrage," far more than a compilation of sources, shaped a story of nineteenth-century feminism entirely around their wing of the movement. As one historian has aptly remarked, Stanton's "narrative grasp on the past has been so tight that at times it has been difficult to free the historical record" (Kern, 21). Separating the strands and meanings of Stanton's life story from her telling of it will be one of the greatest challenges—and pleasures--of writing this book.

The resources for this project are vast and somewhat daunting, but they are beautifully archived. The Stanton-Anthony papers, which include letters, diaries, organizational papers, and the "Revolution," are on forty-five reels of microfilm and will provide the bulk of the source materials. I will also examine letters to, from, and about Stanton in collections at Smith College, the Schlesinger Library (Radcliffe), the Boston Public Library, and the Library of Congress. I expect to do the bulk of the research by the end of 2006. A NEH fellowship for 2006-2007 would allow me to be on leave from teaching and to devote the year to completing research and writing the Stanton biography.

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